THE JESTER.
EVERY SATURDAY.

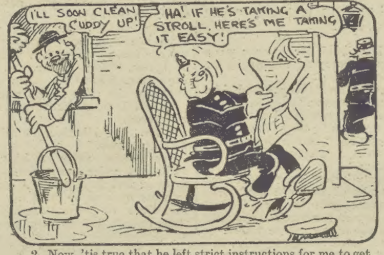
"SON OF A GUN-MAN!"

A Tale of a Young Western Cowboy who is driven to take the Six-gun Trail against a Notorious Rustling Rancher. You can START TO-DAY.

No. 1,466. DECEMBER 14, 1929.

THE COMICAL CAPERS OF CONSTABLE CUDDLECOOK!

1. Dear Mr. Editor, My Funny Old Friend,—My old inspector, Flipflap, felt very busy the other morning; in fact he was so busy that he insisted upon me working all the time so that he could have something to inspect. Then he went out.

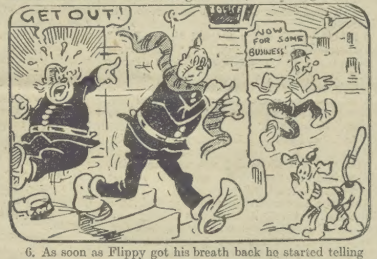


2. Now, 'tis true that he left strict instructions for me to get on with the doings whilst he was away, but I was feeling sort of tired and I decided to have a rest and read. But no sooner had I settled down to enjoy my old self than things happened!

3. In the first place a bad lad by the name of Roughneck Ned peeped into the station and decided to do me a bit of no good with my own pail and mop. And in the second place Flippy came back earlier than I thought! Yes, I was caught!

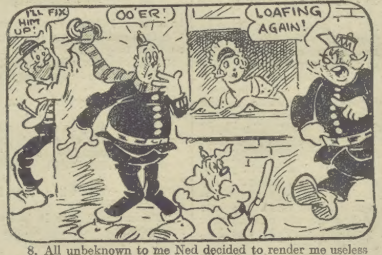
4. The moment I spotted Flippy I jumped out of the old rocking-chair quickly. It was just as well that I did, for at that moment Ned dropped a bucket of water which was meant for my head. It just missed me and bounced on to the chair.

5. The next thing I knew was hearing something whiz past my ear and catching a glimpse of the old pail shooting off the rocking-chair and then smack into Flippy's face! I had to do a chuckle, but I knew there'd soon be trouble for poor me!



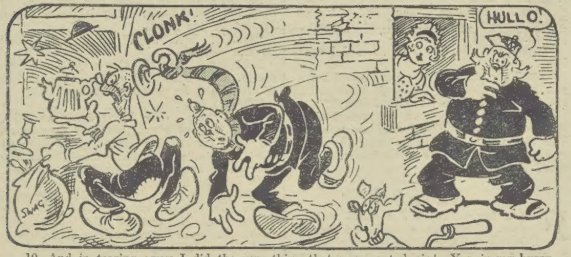
6. As soon as Flippy got his breath back he started telling me a few personal facts about myself and my relations, and when he had finished he ordered me to get out on duty as fast as I could. So grabbing up my muffler and belt I bunked.

7. Feeling a little bit down-hearted I made up my mind to pop along and pay a call on little Pansy Piecrust, my pet pie-architect. Now, it so happened that that bad lad Roughneck Ned had business in the same neighbourhood! He had and all!

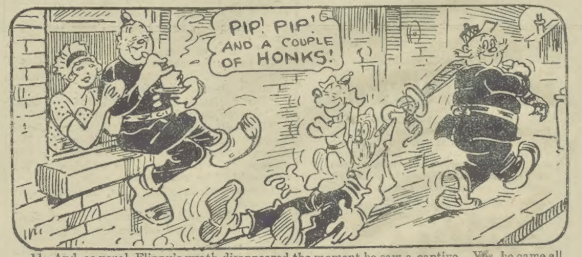


8. All unbeknown to me Ned decided to render me useless whilst I was around, and grabbing the end of my muffler he soon had me in a bit of a fix. And then blessed if old Flippy didn't come creeping round again to see what I was up to!

9. My inspector went right off the deep-end for the second time that afternoon, and there was such a nasty look in his eye that I decided to make myself scarce as quickly as I could. So I tore myself away from Pansy and bunked some more!



10. And in tearing away I did the very thing that was wanted, sir! Yes, in my hurry I didn't notice I was tied to that hook in the wall! The moment I took my hook I tore away a fair-sized chunk of house, and I am happy to report that same dropped on Ned's head with some force. I couldn't have thought of a more stunning way to capture him, sir!



11. And, as usual, Flippy's wrath disappeared the moment he saw a captive. Yes, he came all over polite to me for a little while and actually begged me to take the rest of the afternoon off while he went back to the station with Ned. I didn't want telling twice, sir! Not me! I invited myself to tea with Pansy, you bet!—Yours,

CONSTABLE CUDDLECOOK.

"JUST WE THREE"

You will find laughter and tears in this human story of the adventures of two homeless brothers and their girl chum. START IT TO-DAY!

A Gang of Thieves!

"LOOK here, Jess, quick!"

Joe Blake, aged fourteen, spoke in a tense, scared whisper as he looked up from the window where he was stooping and beckoned to his girl chum who stood, a shadowy figure, in the darkness.

Quickly Jess knelt in the soft earth beside him and peered through a chink in the curtains into the lighted room. Her heart sank as she saw, inside, the stalwart figures of two policemen frowning down sternly at a little boy who shrank from them in fear—a little boy of about five years of age in a warm but shabby coat.

It was Jimmy, Joe's little brother, who was missing, and for whom she and Joe had been searching for hours. Jess looked round at Joe in dismay, her face deathly pale.

"Wh-what is the matter, Joe?" she whispered. "How did he get here, in this house? What has he been doing?"

Joe's lips set grimly, for the truth was plain enough to him now.

It was not what little Jimmy had been doing, but Mr. Flannagan, and Mr. Slim, and the other men who had pretended to be so simple and so generous, and who had given him and Jess and Jimmy food and shelter.

Joe leaned closer to Jess as he peered into the room.

"I told you I did not trust them, Jess," he whispered almost fiercely. "They are a gang of thieves, and they brought Jimmy along to this house to help them rob it. Then somebody in the house raised the alarm, and the police were called, and Mr. Flannagan and Slim and the rest had to run for their lives."

"And—and poor little Jimmy was caught, Joe?"

"Of course. They did not wait for him. He would not run. He wouldn't realise what was the matter."

Joe trembled a little as he peered into the room. Little Jimmy was crying now and rubbing his eyes with his small fist. The sight drew from Jess a cry of dismay and indignation. She sprang up.

"Joe! Let's go in and tell them! It isn't fair for them to frighten Jimmy. Let's knock and—and explain!"

She raised a hand to beat upon the window, but Joe seized her arm, his face paling.

"No! Don't! Not—not yet!"

There was a break in Joe's voice, and his eyes were bright with fear and uncertainty. He did not know what to do for the best. If they knocked and went in, it might mean that he would be locked up, too. The policemen might recognise him as the boy who had tried to change the bad pound note a few days before. He was older than Jimmy—years older. They might say that he was in the swim with the rest of the gang, and send him to prison, or a reformatory.

And then little Jimmy would be alone and friendless and have to go to the Home which he dreaded so much.

Suddenly he saw one of the constables raise Jimmy in his arms and stride to the door. A light appeared in the hall. They were coming out. Joe leapt quickly to his feet and seized Jess by the hand.

"Quick! They're coming!" he whispered. Together they sped across the lawn and out through a gap in the thick hedge, into the lane beyond, where Joe drew back with a gasp. A closed saloon car stood there waiting with a policeman at the wheel. It looked like one of the fast cars of the Flying Squad.

"Joe," Jess whispered brokenly, "what will they do with him?"

"Sh-h!"

Joe pressed her hand for silence as a policeman appeared carrying Jimmy in his arms; Jimmy was crying.

"I don't want to go!" they heard him sob. "I want my bruvver."

"All right. I dare say we'll find your brother soon, my son," they heard the policeman say gruffly, "and a few of the other beauties, too. You sit in there for a bit and keep warm."

He thrust Jimmy into the car and closed the door, which was of the type that locks automatically and cannot be opened from the inside. He paused for a minute to talk in a low tone to the officer at the wheel.

"We've got a line on the gang this time all right, Bill," he said, and then strode back to the house.

Joe's heart beat quickly as he peered towards the waiting car. If only he could creep up quietly and let Jimmy out! Then a sudden idea came, and he turned to Jess, whispering his plan eagerly.

"You steal round inside the hedge and round the back of the car," he said, under his breath. "When you see your chance, get him out quickly!"

They were crouching together in the deep shadows of the ditch which fringed the lane, and Jess crept up the bank through the gap by which they had come. Joe waited some minutes. Then, stooping lower, he gave vent to a deep, low groan—"M-m-mmm!"

He saw the still figure of the officer quicken into life and peer towards him.

"M-m-mmmm!" he groaned again, a little louder.

The constable jumped up, throwing off his rug and climbed down into the lane, while Joe slithered quickly through the gap and along the inside of the hedge. He paused and lay still as he saw the officer stride up the lane and stop by the spot where he had crouched a few moments earlier.

"Anyone here?" he heard the policeman demand, as he peered into the ditch.

There came no answer, of course, and a grunt broke from the officer. Suddenly Joe saw the beam of a torch searching the ditch and the gap, and, rising, he sped silently for the gate. Meanwhile, a slim figure stole just as silently up in the rear of the now deserted car. Jess' slim hand groped for the door handle and turned it, opening the door quickly.

"Jimmy! Keep quiet!" she whispered. "Don't make a sound! Here, quick!"

In a moment he was in her arms, trembling, and she was off and down the lane like a shadow. A few seconds and another shadowy figure overtook her. It was Joe, his heart thumping with relief.

"Jess! It was fine! We tricked him beautifully. Here, give him to me! Good old Jimmy! Ups-a-daisy!"

He had Jimmy on his back in a brace of shakes and sped with Jess to the end of the lane, and then, by a maze of side turnings back to the house which they knew, now, to be a nest of rascals.

In the deep shade of the evergreens in the neglected front garden they paused for breath. Jess caught Joe's arm.

"Joe! Don't come back here! I hate it!" she whispered. "Let's run away."

"But all our things are here, Jess! Your money you saved—everything! Besides, it wouldn't be safe to wander the streets. The police will be watching. We must hide," he whispered tensely.

Jess peered into his face, her own eyes troubled.

"But they will see Jimmy. What shall we say then? How can we say he got back here?"

"We must hide him until we're ready to go, Jess. And we must get in somehow without them knowing. We've got to!"

He mounted the steps and peered up at the dark face of the house, which showed no lights, though he knew that Mr. Flannagan and the rest were well occupied somewhere inside.

No window gave any hope of entering. Joe paused, nonplussed. Then suddenly little Jimmy pointed to the open fanlight. "I can get in there. Bunk me up, quick!" he whispered. "Mr. Flannelfeet showed me how to do it."

It was their only chance, and Joe raised Jimmy in his arms, thrusting him up. With an agility which surprised them, Jimmy wriggled through, feet first, and dropped without noise on the mat. The well-oiled bolts slid silently; so did the catch. A minute, and the door opened, revealing Jimmy there with a broad smile of pride.

"I told you I could!" he said. "Mr. Flannelfeet showed me how to!"

"Sh-h! Quiet, son!" Joe smiled, to think how one of the old rogue's tricks, at any rate, had been turned against himself. "Mr. Flannagan mustn't see you here. Come on!"

They could hear angry voices issuing from the back room as they stole by and up the stairs—one voice, which he did not recognise, being louder and angrier than the rest. Silently, they mounted the stairs to the attic rooms where they slept.

"Shall I pack our things up, Joe?" Jess whispered.

"Yes. We'd better get all ready. Then we'll go, Jess."

Jess stole away quickly, and in a whispered voice Joe questioned Jimmy as to what had happened. A grim light came into his eyes as he read the truth between the lines of Jimmy's simple story. So they had told him they were taking him

Joe opened his eyes sleepily, looking up into the evil, bearded face of Mr. Flannagan.

to a party! And they had put him through the fanlight to open the door of the house so that they could rob it.

"I think they all got cold," Jimmy said, "and that was why they didn't have a party!"

"Cold? Why do you think that, Jimmy?"

"Because they went upstairs and came down with lots of coats," said Jimmy.

"H'm!" muttered Joe. "Fur coats, I expect. When did the police come, Jimmy?"

"They came when the fireworks went off," said Jimmy.

"Fireworks?" Joe looked at him quickly, remembering Mr. Slim's bloodstained shirt. "What fireworks?"

"I was in the garden, and I heard them go off bang!" said Jimmy. "Then everyone started to run. I think the fireworks frightened them!"

"H'm! Perhaps they did, Jimmy. Never mind!" Joe muttered. "To-morrow you and I and Jess are——"

Joe stopped short as Jess entered breathlessly.

"Joe," she said, "I can hear Mr. Flannagan below. Quick! I believe he's coming up. What shall we do with Jimmy?"

Joe's heart jumped as he peered about the small room. There was no place to hide him there. And there came the sound of shuffling steps in the hall below. What could he do?

The Raid!

FOR a few moments Joe stood motionless. Then, in a flash, he remembered the big chest which stood in a corner of the panelled landing, one short flight below. It was roomy and empty; he knew that, because he and Jess had peeped inside it.

Quickly he seized Jimmy in his arms and sprang outside and down the steps. The heavy lid of the chest came up with a creak.

"Hide in there, Jimmy! Don't be frightened! I'll come and fetch you in a minute!" he whispered. "Don't make a noise!"

Trembling, little Jim crouched down, and the lid closed on him. Joe could see the light of a candle ascending, and hear Mr. Flannagan puffing as he came up. He leapt back up the stairs.

"Quick, Jess! Into bed. Pretend to be asleep!" he gasped.

Jess was into her room in a flash, and Joe was into his, leaping into the bed with his clothes on, and pulling the blankets high about him. He waited, his heart thumping, as Mr. Flannagan passed into Jess' room and peered down at her. She lay still and silent, her eyes firmly closed.

The creak of boards on the landing—then the light shone in Joe's face. He opened his eyes sleepily, looking up into the evil, bearded face.

Joe could not resist a question, knowing what he knew.

"Where's Jimmy, Mr. Flannagan?"

The old crook smiled.

"He's downstairs, having some nice hot bread-and-milk," he said. "He got a bit cold and shivery, so I took him down. But he's all right. You go to sleep, my son!"

Joe smiled grimly as he watched the bent figure shuffle out and back down the stairs. For a few minutes Joe waited. Then he rose, and stole down himself to the lower landing, chuckling as he opened the chest.

"Come on, old son!" he whispered. "He's gone now. You——"

He stopped short in sudden dismay, and his heart ceased beating. The chest was empty; Jimmy was not there!

"Jimmy," he whispered brokenly, "Where are you, Jimmy? Oh, dear life, what has happened?"

With a choking feeling, he rushed back up the stairs into Jess' room. She was sitting on the bed.

"Jess—quick! Jimmy's gone! I hid him in the chest, and—and"—his voice broke—"he isn't there!"

A cry of dismay broke from Jess, and she rushed past him down to the landing. Then she stopped, startled, staring with bewildered eyes. For there was Jimmy emerging from the chest like a Jack-in-the-box! A gasp of relief and wonder broke from Joe behind her as he sprang forward.

"Jimmy! Oh, how you frightened me! Where were you?" he cried.

"In there," Jimmy said. "It's ever so funny. Look!"

He stooped, and pressed the inner side of the chest, and, to Joe's amazement, it opened like a shutter, disclosing a dark cavity.

"It opened when I lay down," Jimmy said. "Isn't it funny? I crawled through and went down a ladder into a dark room. Then—then I got frightened, and came back. You get in and try, Jess," he whispered, turning.

Jess did not answer; she was not looking at him, nor at the chest. Her eyes were riveted on the landing window, against which a shadow had mysteriously appeared. She clutched Joe's hand, and pointed.

"Look! What—what is that ladder, Joe? It's just come. I saw it."

The outline of a ladder had appeared outside the window, and Joe sprang across the landing, peering out and down. His heart stopped as he did so. Below, mounting the ladder, he saw a uniformed figure.

He drew back, with blanched cheeks.

"It's the police, Jess!" he whispered. "They're coming up through the window. We must fly—quick!"

He leapt up the stairs, and snatched up Jess' parcel. Then, returning, he raised Jimmy in his arms.

"Quick! This way!" he gasped. "Out by the door!"

Breathless, he led the way down the stairs, with Jess following. At the foot of the flight he paused, waiting.

"Quick, Jess!"

Then—crash! His blood froze as, with a splintering of glass, the front door caved in, as if rammed by some huge weight on the other side. Another crash, and the door burst inwards, followed by two men, with torches flashing.

With a cry of despair, Joe staggered back. They were trapped—trapped! The police had surrounded the house—had closed in upon them back and front—so that there was now no way of escape!

(The outcome of the police raid will be told in next Saturday's thrilling instalment. Order your copy of the JESTER to-day.)

14-12-29

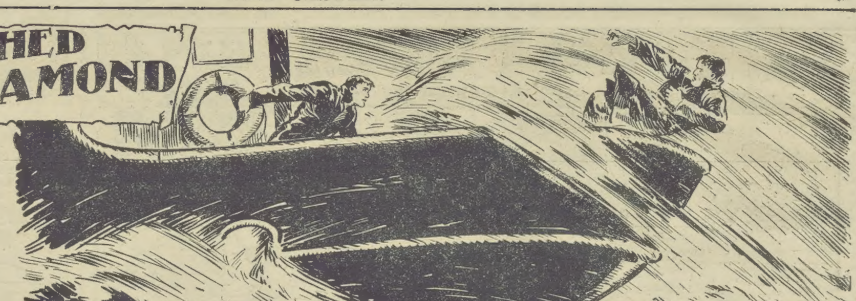
DICK TURPIN

Dick Turpin was an officer in the King's Dragoons, till a duel with the rascally Sir Anthony Lethbridge caused him to become a man with a price on his head. Don't miss the first of a series of adventure stories featuring the famous Highwayman, and his gallant mare, Bess.

BOYS' CINEMA 2d

Out on Tuesday, Dec. 10. Make sure of a Copy.

THE BEWITCHED DIAMOND



A thrilling complete story of an uncanny happening at sea. Told by old Tom Martin, the night-watchman.

* * * * * *

The Lonely Isle.

"ALL of us have got some pet superstition or other," said old Tom Martin, the night-watchman. "I dare say most of you cross your fingers when you go under a ladder; many of you wouldn't dream of leaving a pin on the ground if you saw one. Well, my story to-night concerns superstition, and though I shall not advance any opinion about it when it is told, I am sure that you will not only be interested, but will likewise be thoughtful! Now, let me begin at the beginning."

Tom's youthful audience were soon ready for the tale, and at once the old night-watchman began.

The first mate of the tramp-steamer Helen was a hard-bitten son of the sea who had been eight times round the world in all sorts of craft from a schooner to a man-o'-war.

He had fought his way out of some of the tightest jams that any man might expect to get into, and there wasn't a queer corner of the world that he didn't know about, and most of them he had visited.

When the Helen put into the little port of San Malago, nestling at the foot of the snow-capped Pyrenees and lashed by the wind and rain of the tempetuous storms that continually disturb the Bay of Biscay, a gleam of excitement seemed to come into the eyes of the first mate.

The mate had shipped aboard the Helen for the very purpose of reaching San Malago, and now at last the hour that he had looked forward to for two long months had arrived.

When the Helen was snugly berthed and her skipper was busy in his cabin making a list of stores that would be required, the mate presented himself before his master and in a low voice asked for forty-eight hours' shore leave.

"That's all right with me, Murrell," the skipper replied. "We'll be in port for four or five days, and there'll be nothing for you to do, but why in the name of all that's wonderful do you want shore leave in a benighted Spanish fishing port like San Malago?"

"Just a little bit of business, skipper," said the mate evasively. "I was here some two or three months ago, and made a few friends back of the town. Thought I'd like to look them up and renew old acquaintanceship. Do you mind if I take young Weston with me, sir?"

"If he feels like going ashore in this hole I won't stop him, Murrell," said the skipper with a frown. "I'll expect you both back in a couple of days. Send the bo'sun to me as you go on deck, will you? I must get this store list sent ashore at once."

And so it came about that less than a couple of hours later Steve Murrell, the mate, and Jim Weston, ship's apprentice, were seated opposite each other inside a dark little Spanish cafe well away from the quayside of the little port.

"You're still wondering why I asked you to come ashore with me, eh, Weston?" said the mate.

"Well, I'm going to tell you now—and if you'll throw in your lot with me, I'll make you a comparatively rich young man within the next forty-eight hours. Have you ever heard of Satan's Ring?"

"Can't say I have, mister," said young Jim. "What's it all about?"

"Satan's Ring is a piece of jewellery with a very romantic history, Jim," said the mate, dropping all formality now that he was off the bridge of his ship. "In the past three months I've learned that history over and over again. The ring itself is a plain gold band set with a single diamond of great size and enormous value. Where it came from originally no one seems to know; but it first made its appearance in Spain a couple of hundred years ago. In the first place it was sent to the then reigning king by a foreign princess whom the king had promised to marry and didn't. This lady, jealous, no doubt, seemed to know something about the ring. She sent it to the king with the request that he should wear it in memory of her."

"And did he?" asked Jim interestedly.

"Not at first," said the mate. "He presented it to his new-made wife—and that good lady died mysteriously two days afterwards. Nobody thought of blaming the ring for that, however.

"After the death of the new queen the king wore the ring himself for a time. A few weeks later he was thrown from his horse and killed. The ring was upon his finger at the time, and together with other personal jewellery passed to the son of the reigning house. This son was killed by some fanatical revolutionary a very short time later. Then, it seems, some wise man proclaimed to the world in general that it was the ring that was responsible for all these terrible tribulations. The reigning family in Spain at the time were a superstitious lot, and they believed that in some way or other the ring was haunted or bewitched. Steps were taken to get rid of it immediately."

Murrell paused, and again that strange gleam came into his eyes.

"The ring went wandering on upon its tragic journey," he continued. "It passed from hand to hand, family to family, and tragedy befell each separate owner. Then someone had a brain-wave. The ring, sealed in an iron casket, was sent to a monastery, and with ceremony—with bell, book, and candle—was solemnly buried in the monastery grounds so that its evil influence might be forever done away with."

Murrell laughed harshly.

"Rot and nonsense!" he said. "As if a diamond ring could anyway affect the workings of Fate! Jimmy, that ring was buried on a little island where now only the ruins of that ancient monastery stands. To-day, a diamond of that size and lustre would be worth anything from ten thousand pounds upwards! Listen! I know the very spot where Satan's Ring is hid! Will you come with me to try to find it?"

Jim Weston gripped the arms of the old armchair in which he sat, and stared at the mate in awe and excitement.

"Ten thousand pounds?" he gasped, "Jumping Jupiter! Do you really mean it, Mister Murrell? You're not pulling my leg, are you?"

"No!" said the mate shortly. "I'm in deadly earnest. I learned the secret of Satan's Ring from an old monk whom I once did a good turn to up there in those snow-capped mountains. Since then I've read up everything I could about Spanish history of that period. There's no doubt that the ring existed; no doubt that it was buried. There is no evidence that it was ever dug up again! Jim, I need help to unearth this treasure. There's digging to be done, and it's a hard pull out to the lonely island where the ruins stand. I'll give you a fifth share of whatever I get for the diamond, if we find it; in return you'll give me all the assistance I need. Are you game?"

"Am I?" said Jim, his voice vibrant with excitement. "You bet I am, Mister Murrell! When do we start?"

"Now!" said the mate, rising quickly. "We'll get to the island, get to the spot marked on the plan I have made, and if we find the stone we'll go back to the Helen, and so back to Blighty. Once there, I'll sell the jewel, and you get your cash. Not a word to the others, mind! No reason to let them in on the scheme—besides, most sailormen are superstitious. They'd get terrific wind up if they thought I was carrying a ring with a curse about me. Come on, lad! Let's get a move on."

Amid the Ruins.

THE tumbled ruins of the old monastery on the lonely isle looked forbidding and uninviting in the grey light of the November afternoon.

Jim Weston and the mate were perspiring freely as they hitched the rope of their little dinghy to a broken pile and climbed ashore, each carrying a pick and a spade.

"This is the spot!" Murrell snapped at last. "Yes; here's the stone pillar the old monk mentioned. Ah! And here's a slab that marked the spot where Satan's Ring was buried, with all due ritual. To work, Jimmy! We've got to get down six feet—and the light's going!"

Like a pair possessed the treasure-seekers set to work, and under the lusty blows of their picks, the long-undisturbed earth broke up quickly, and was hastily shovelled aside.

It was Jim Weston who uttered a shout when his pick suddenly clanged on something that rang hollow.

With renewed frenzy the two dug and shovelled, and then, with a suppressed shout of excitement, a small, brass-bound iron chest was dragged from the hole and dumped upon the pile of earth beside it.

Violent blows from the pick soon shattered the rusting box. The treasure-hunters dropped to their knees, and then, in tense silence, the mate drew forth a little leather pouch, and a moment later two pairs of eyes were fastened on the exquisite diamond that was set in the centre of Satan's Ring.

"We've got it! By jingo, we've got it!" snapped Murrell. "We win, Jimmy! Isn't it superb? Yes; and it's worth every penny of fifteen thousand pounds!. We're rich, laddie! Come! Leave the picks and the shovels. Let's get back to the mainland before it's quite dark. Back to the Helen! Then for home and a small fortune! What's the matter, lad? You're looking as white as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Nothing, Mr. Murrell," said Jim slowly. "I—I feel sort of funny. Guess it's a kind of reaction after the excitement. I—I—— Let's get off this place. It's sort of giving me the creeps."

They hurried down to the little dinghy, and were pulling out to sea towards the mainland again in no time.

Jimmy Weston was feeling very strange. A sort of unknown fear, a dread of disaster had settled on him. Once he stopped rowing and stared straight at Murrell, his face white as a sheet.

"You're nervy, boy!" said the mate. "What's come over you? You—you aren't thinking about the so-called curse that goes with this ring, are you? Cheer up, my lad! We'll soon get rid of the thing, and have good money to spend for this afternoon's work!"

"Mister!" said Jim slowly. "I—I don't like it. I—I've never been superstitious before, but somehow I feel we've done wrong in digging up that ring. Can't we—can't we get rid of it—throw it in the sea, or something?"

"Nonsense!" said the mate, with a laugh. "The excitement has got you down a bit, Jim. You'll be all right when we get aboard the Helen. I thought you had more sense than to believe these old grandmother's superstitions. How can a diamond ring possibly bring trouble to anyone? It's all my eye, take it from me!"

Jimmy was vastly relieved when they reached the mainland, however. He was even more at ease when once more they stepped aboard the Helen.

"Glad you're back on time, Mr. Murrell," said the skipper. "By a miracle I've got my stores from these lazy Spaniards, and can leave with the morning tide. Tell the engineers to get steam up when you're ready, will you? May as well get out of the Bay before the wind shifts."

The Helen sailed at dawn the next morning, and as she stole out into the grey mist of the Bay of Biscay, Jimmy Weston felt all his sense of lurking danger return to him.

It seemed to him that shadow hovered over the ship, and when she got out into the deeps every roll and pitch gave the young apprentice a heartburn, a thing which he had not experienced before.

When the skipper came up to relieve the mate a few hours later he glanced around with something of a frown.

"Wind's veered!" he said shortly. "Looks as if she intends to blow a bit of a snorter, Murrell. Get her all snugged down. I don't like the look of the weather a bit."

But despite the intense activity that followed on board, the Helen was not quite prepared to meet the sudden violent squall that bore down on her.

The sky darkened suddenly, and a shrieking wind sprang up and sang through the little vessel's rigging. The big Atlantic rollers grew bigger, and soon the Helen was shipping heavy seas.

The skipper, muffled in his oilskins, was glued to his bridge, shouting orders in a foghorn voice to his scurrying crew.

Then suddenly Jim Weston, crouched in the lee of the wheelhouse, saw Murrell, the mate, fighting his way along the slippery deck towards the bridge, where he strove to reach the skipper's side.

In a veritable tornado of fury, the storm reached its height at that moment. A huge breaker swamped the ship, and, breathless, Jimmy saw the mate swept over the taffrail into the boiling seas.

With a shout of dismay, Jimmy caught at a lifebelt, already secured by a rope to a bollard amidships.

Even as he slipped the belt over his head the young apprentice jumped into the boiling seas in a mad endeavour to save the mate.

But Murrell had disappeared in the trough of foamy waters. It seemed to Jimmy that he heard a mad satanic laugh as he gasped for breath amid the buffeting waves.

Then they were hauling him back to the Helen, and soon had him gasping on the deck, and then whisked away below to hot rum and blankets.

From the very moment of Murrell's disappearance the storm began to abate. Within an hour the Helen was riding on calm seas, with a watery sun trying to break through the quickly-moving clouds.

All that day they searched for the mate's body, but Stephen Murrell and Satan's Ring were never seen again.

Jimmy Martin never told the story of that trip to the lonely isle to a soul; he was afraid of being laughed at. Never before had he been superstitious; but the adventure on board the Helen made him think deeply.

Whether Stephen Murrell met his death as the direct result of having uncarthed the ring that was supposed to be cursed is a matter of argument.

One thing is certain—Jimmy Martin believes that he did, and Jimmy is grateful to this day that he did not share in the proceeds that might have been gained from the sale of that lovely jewel.

"That's my story," concluded old Tom, with a smile. "And I shall leave you to draw your own conclusions from it. The Satan's Ring lies at the bottom of the Atlantic, and, cursed or not, it can no longer harm any man with its evil influence. Good-night, all!"

(Another complete tale told by old Tom Martin, the night-watchman, will appear in next Saturday's JESTER.)

In a veritable tornado of fury the storm reached its height. A huge breaker swamped the ship, and, breathless, Jimmy saw Mr. Murrell, the mate, swept over the taffrail into the boiling seas.

14-12-29

UNCLE SQUIBS AND HIS NAUGHTY NIBS

1. Sissy was having a terrific struggle with the lid of a new tin of toffee, and young Nicky was enjoying his cowboy game so much that he hadn't time to come and help her! No!

2. And whilst Sis continued to struggle Nicky neatly dropped his lariat over her and gave a whoop. Now, uncle heard that whoop and decided to join in the game that Nicky was playing.

NOW I'LL PULL HER ALONG.
MOO-OO! I'M THE WILD BUFFALO OF THE PRAIRIE!
TOFFEES
HA! HA! HOW DO YOU LIKE PLAYING AT COWBOYS SISSY
ZOK!
TOFFEE

3. Fixing a pair of horns on his dome, uncle came chasing out with a couple of loud "Moos!" "Look out!" he cried. "I'm the wild buffalo of the prairie!" Then he put his foot in it!

4. Yes, neatly he was caught in Nicky's lasso just as the little lad was about to dart off thinking he'd roped Sis! Uncle came down with a dong—luckily on the old toffee-tin!

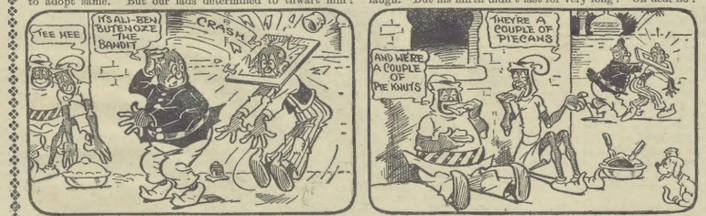
5. And that rather helped Sissy! Yes, that blow helped the lid of the tin to come off, and Sissy was highly delighted about it. Uncle seemed to be the only one who was annoyed!

6. In fact, the old lad spent a busy five minutes in jumping on everything in sight, and vowing that he'd never join in the Nibs' games again! But you bet he will before long! Mps!

Seezum & Squeezum, the Artful Arabs.

1. The sweet Serafina, who cooks for the Sheik of Shallow, had made a pie especially for her pals Seezum and Squeezum. But P.-c. Ali Bazooka spotted the tit-bit and made up his mind to adopt same. But our lads determined to thwart him!

2. Yes, with the aid of a stick and a window with a broken hinge they managed to give the constable a bonk that pained him severely. And then a bad lad trotted up and had a good laugh. But his mirth didn't last for very long! Oh dear no!



3. You see, that window frame slid off Bazooka's bean and bounced on top of the bad lad's dome, and the gallant P.-c. turned round and recognised one Butenoze, the bandit! In a couple of shakes Bazooka grabbed the bad lad and took him off!

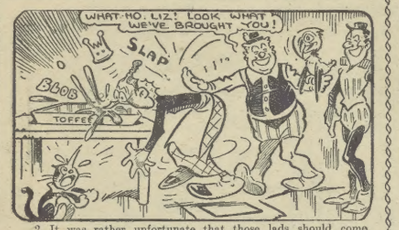
4. And Seezum and Squeezum seated themselves and forthwith indulged in a real old feed of Serafina's pie. "We framed that up properly, O long brother!" said Squeezum. "We sure did, fat stiff!" said Seezum. "We're not pies, are we?"

LIZZIE COMICAL AND HER COURTIERS

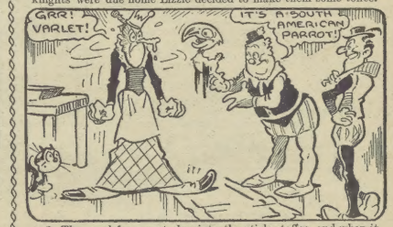
FRANCIS HAKE — WALTER RALLY

LIZZIE HAS A STICKY TIME AND LOSES HER HEAD TO CROWN IT!

1. Sir Walter Rally and Sir Francis Hake had been on an exploring cruise as far as Wigan, and when she heard that her knights were due home Lizzie decided to make them some toffee.

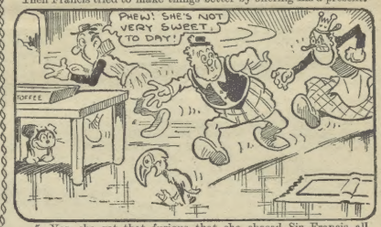


2. It was rather unfortunate that those lads should come home whilst Queenie was in the middle of the toffee-making. Yes, Francis gave her such a friendly slap on the back! Fact!



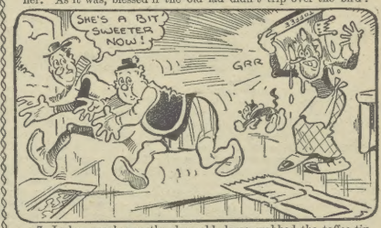
3. The royal face went slap into the sticky toffee, and when it was pulled out again Lizzie wasn't feeling any too friendly. No! Then Francis tried to make things better by offering Liz a present.

4. Now, the present—a Big-Beaked Parrot—was fond of toffee, and when he saw some on Lizzie's nose he made a grab! That didn't improve matters a bit! No, the queen lost her head!



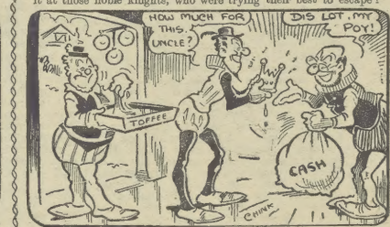
5. Yes, she got that furious that she chased Sir Francis all around the room, and the noble knight had quite a job to dodge her. As it was, blessed if the old lad didn't trip over the bird!

6. Lizzie got another faceful of toffee on account of that! Yes, Frankie tried to save himself by grabbing the table, and that upset everything! Lizzie was that wild now! Ods cats!

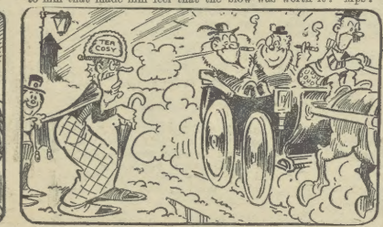


7. In her royal rage the dear old dame grabbed the toffee-tin off her head, and after a struggle gave a mighty heave and sent it at those noble knights, who were trying their best to escape!

8. The tin caught Francis a beauty as he scuttled through the doorway, but Sir Wally whispered a few words of cheerage to him that made him feel that the blow was worth it! Mps!



9. You see, the royal crown was stuck to the toffee-tin, and within a few ticks those noble knights had popped round to the nearest pop-shop and done a good bit of business with the boss!

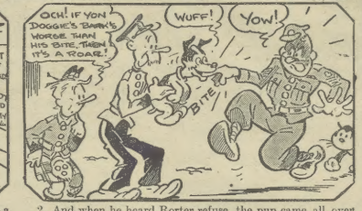


10. And whilst the rich knights rode by in their carriage and pair, Lizzie had to walk to the palace with a tea-cosy on her dome instead of a crown. Yes, that properly crowned it! 14-12-29

SANDY AND DUSTY THE REGIMENTAL RASCALS

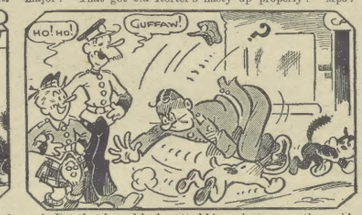
WE ONLY WANT A DOG BISCUIT EACH AND A GLASS OF POP FOR THE DOG!
CAN'T HELP IT! THE CANTEEN'S CLOSED TO YOU!
CANTEEN
OUT OF BOUNDS TO SANDY AND DUSTY SARGE

1. Old Sergeant-major Rorter thought that he was getting a spot of own back on Sandy and Dusty when he put the canteen out of bounds to them. And all they wanted was a dog-biscuit.



2. And when he heard Rorter refuse, the pup came all over nasty and made a snap at the pointing finger of the old sergeant-major! That got old Rorter's nasty up properly! Mps!

3. "Bah!" snarled he. "I won't allow dogs in my army! Now I'll take him outside and give him away!" And bending down, the nasty old nasty made a grab at the poor old puplet!



4. But that hound had spotted his ancient enemy the cook's cat, and with a wuff he set off after it! In the excitement Rorter got tripped over and kissed the parade ground heartily!

5. "Come on, Sandy!" cried Dusty. "The pup's gone into the canteen! He can't stop us going in to get it, anyway!" And treading on Rorter as they passed, those lads dashed away!

6. The sergeant-major felt so dizzy that he forgot to salute the colonel, who bobbed up just then. That meant trouble for him, but those Rascals didn't worry! No! They just celebrated!

Jessie Joy, Just Like a Boy.

1. Our joyful Jessie Joy was having fine fun on the swing she had rigged up—but she wouldn't have been so pleased if she had known that Sophie Slink was around ready to do her unkind action for the day. See Sophie up the old tree, eh?

2. The Slinkie lass did a loud grin as she suddenly cut one of the ropes of the swing and saw that Jessie looked like having a fall. But Jessie had her wits about her and jumped clear of the swing as soon as she realised the danger! Mps!

3. That didn't help Sophie very much! No! As a matter of fact that springy old branch went back with a click and gave the Slinkie lass a smack in the neck just for luck! Then Jessie got busy with the rest of the swing in quick time!

4. Sophie found herself in a bit of a fix as well as up a tree a few ticks later! Yes, Jess tied her up neatly and left her there until she felt all sorry for herself. "Don't try to swing it on me again, my girl!" said our Jessie with a laugh!

JERRY JONES AND UNCLE BONES

Don't miss this complete story if you enjoy a hearty laugh.

THE shrill blast of a steam whistle rang out across the builder's yard, and Jerry Jones, the young assistant carpenter, straightened his back and stepped away from the bench at which he had been working.

"Hallo! What's that? Is it time to get up?"

It was Uncle Bones, Jerry's pet parrot, who spoke, and the wily old bird fluttered down from a gas-bracket, where it had been sleeping, and perched itself on the boy's shoulder.

"No, it isn't time to get up, uncle!" laughed Jerry. "It's time to knock off!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the parrot. "What are we going to knock off? I feel hungry, I do!"

"You're always thinking of something to eat!" grinned Jerry. "You don't seem to realise, uncle, that it is Saturday afternoon. That whistle we just heard is the signal to cease work for the day. You see, it has just struck one!"

"Who has?" squawked the parrot. "Where's the fight?"

The boy stared at his pet, and shook his head in a puzzled fashion.

"I don't understand you, uncle!" he said. "I didn't say anything about a fight!"

"But you said it had just struck one!" croaked the wily old bird.

Jerry laughed heartily.

"Oh, I meant that the clock had just struck one!" he explained.

"But who's been struck one on the clock?" persisted the parrot.

"Nobody, you silly old silly!" smiled Jerry. "You know what a clock is, don't you?"

"Not half!" shouted uncle.

"Well, what is it?"

"Your face—that's a fine clock!"

"Oh, got one of your funny fits on today!" laughed Jerry, as he donned his overcoat. "Come on! I promised to meet Ethel outside the yard gates, and we mustn't keep her waiting in the cold!"

Ethel Bright was Jerry's landlady's pretty daughter, and the two youngsters were staunch chums.

As the boy turned to the door of the workshop, with his pet parrot perched on his shoulder, he saw his guv'nor, Mr. Slater, hurrying across the yard towards him.

"Ah, Jones," he said, with a cheery smile, "I was hoping to catch you before you left. Are you doing anything special this afternoon?"

Jerry flushed to the roots of his hair. He and Ethel had arranged to go for a long country ramble, but he was too shy to mention this fact to Mr. Slater.

"No, sir; nothing very special," he replied haltingly.

"Well, that's good," smiled the master builder. "Now, I wonder if you would mind doing a bit of digging in my garden? There's a couple of beds that should be dug over this week-end, and, unfortunately, my gardener is laid up with a nasty chill. Do you think you could manage them for me?"

"Certainly, sir!" replied Jerry. "Will there be anybody there to show me what's to be done?"

Mr. Slater shook his head.

"Unfortunately, no," he said. "We are not moving into the house until next week, so the place is empty at the moment. But here is a plan of the garden," he added, handing Jerry a sheet of paper, "and the beds to be dug over are clearly marked there. You will find all the tools you want in the shed. Now, is everything quite clear?"

"Yes, sir," nodded Jerry, folding the plan, and placing it inside his coat-pocket. "I'll go along there immediately I have finished my lunch."

"So will I, Mr. Tater!" squawked Uncle Bones, who always got mixed up with Mr. Slater's name. "Did you see the fight, Mr. Cabbage?"

"The fight!" echoed the master builder, glancing at Jerry with a look of surprise on his smiling face. "What fight?"

"There hasn't been a fight, sir," put in Jerry quickly. "But uncle thinks there has, because I happened to remark that the clock had struck one."

"Ho, ho! What a joke!" chuckled Mr. Slater heartily. "Uncle always gets hold of the wrong end of the stick!"

"Who's got the stick?" squawked the parrot. "I don't want the stick! I'm a good boy, I am! What-ho!"

"Yes, you're good when you are asleep, uncle!" smiled Jerry.

A few minutes later Jerry hurried through the gates of the builder's yard, where he found Ethel awaiting him outside.

"I thought you were never finishing today," she said, blowing into her cupped hands to warm them. "Have you been working overtime?"

"No. He's been working overweight!" shouted Uncle Bones.

"Now you keep quiet, you rascal!" laughed Jerry. "No, I haven't been working overtime, Ethel," he added, turning to his chum. "But I've got to this afternoon! I'm afraid our little ramble in the country is all off!"

And as the happy smile faded quickly from his chum's pretty face, Jerry went on to tell her of Mr. Slater's orders for that afternoon.

"I don't think the job should take me more than a couple of hours," he said. "And as the house is situated in a quiet country lane, it will be quite pleasant working there, and we might find a few odd plants for your mother's garden."

"Right-ho! Then I'll come along with you," smiled the girl.

After a hurried lunch of Irish stew and dumplings, which the chums ate with healthy appetites, they made their way to Mr. Slater's new house, on the outskirts of the town. And after studying the plan carefully for a few moments, Jerry started digging over the beds, while Ethel and Uncle Bones explored the garden.

Both the beds had been marked out by the gardener, but the soil had not been turned over for years, and Jerry's arms were soon aching from the exertion.

Presently, however, his spade slipped easily into the soil, and he paused for a moment, with a look of surprise on his face.

"That's funny! This part of the bed has been dug over quite recently, by the feel of things!" he murmured. "I wonder if anything has been buried here?"

As he spoke, he pushed the spade into the soil again, and a few inches under the surface he felt it strike against something hard and glance off.

"Hallo! I've struck a rock!" he muttered. "I suppose I'd better clear that out!"

He bent down and peered into the small hole he had made, and then as his eyes caught the glint of metal, he began to scrape away the earth with his fingers.

Within a few seconds he had uncarthed a small steel box, about eighteen inches square and twelve inches deep, and as he stood scraping the clinging earth from it, he called to his chum.

"Hi, Ethel! Come and have a look at what I've found!"

A moment later Ethel came running up, her pretty face flushed with excitement.

"Hallo! Have you been unearthing treasure?" she panted.

"I don't know," replied Jerry, with a shake of his head. "But it feels jolly heavy! Shall I try to open it? Or do you think I should take it along to Mr. Slater first?"

"I should open it," suggested Ethel, bubbling over with curiosity. "After all, it may be empty, and Mr. Slater might think you were playing a joke on him. Is it locked?"

"Yes. And very securely, too, by a padlock," returned Jerry. "But I've heard that you can sometimes force open a padlock if you give it a sharp blow. Anyway, we'll try."

Placing the box on the ground, Jerry gave the lock a sharp crack with the shoulder of the spade, but it was not until he had delivered half a dozen blows at it that the box snapped open.

Then, with hands that trembled with excitement, Jerry slowly lifted the lid, to disclose a sight that drew gasps of amazement from the chums.

Lying jumbled together in the box were pearl necklaces, diamond brooches and rings, and jewelled cigarette-cases.

Never before had the chums seen or handled such precious and valuable jewellery, and for a moment they stood staring at the dazzling articles, too amazed to make any comment.

Jerry was the first to recover from the shock, and he turned swiftly to his chum.

"Oh, my giddy aunt, Ethel!" he exclaimed. "There's a small fortune here. This—this must be stolen property!"

"Why, what makes you say that?"

The girl's face had gone white with excitement.

"Well, people don't usually keep their jewels buried underground, and this box has not been here long, because there is no sign of rust on it. Yes, I'm sure it's stolen property."

"Then what are you going to do with it? You've found it in Mr. Slater's garden. I suppose the only thing to do is to hand it over to him."

"Or to the police," put in Jerry. "I shan't be able to get in touch with Mr. Slater until Monday morning, and I don't feel like taking the risk of looking after all this jewellery over the week-end. No; I think I had better hand it over to the police."

As he spoke Jerry laid the open box on the ground, and quickly donned his jacket.

Meanwhile, Uncle Bones had observed the open box, and, thinking it contained something tasty to eat, promptly hopped inside to examine the contents. As he did so, a sudden gust of wind closed the lid of the box with a snap that gave Uncle Bones a crack on the head, knocking the parrot dizzy for a few seconds.

And thus it was that when Jerry picked up the box a few moments later and fastened the padlock, he was quite unaware that his pet was inside.

"Well, Ethel," he said, "are you ready?"

"Rather!" exclaimed the girl, with a nervous little laugh. "I don't think I have ever felt so excited as I am at this moment. I'm wondering what the police will say when——"

She broke off suddenly as a dark shadow suddenly appeared at her feet, and a low cry of surprise broke from her lips as she half-turned to see a tall, well-built man with a dark, sinister-looking face staring at Jerry with a hard look in his eyes.

"I have to thank you youngsters for unearthing my box for me," he said, in a quiet voice that sent an icy chill running through Ethel. "You have saved me a lot of trouble and hard work."

He held out his hand to Jerry as he spoke, fully expecting the boy to give him the box; but as Jerry shrank back, clutching the box tightly under his arm, the man's eyes narrowed to gleaming slits.

"Hand over that box, d'you hear!" he snarled. "It's my property, and I want it! Hand it over!"

Jerry stepped back quickly as the man advanced towards him with his shoulders hunched and his head thrust forward like a snake about to strike.

"You're not getting this box from me," replied the boy quickly. "I'm not denying that it may belong to you; but I discovered it under very suspicious circumstances, and I'm taking it to the police. This land belongs to my guv'nor, Mr. Slater, and you've no right to bury any article here without his permission."

"I'll show you if I have any right to bury anything here!" hissed the man. "Hand over that box, or I'll throttle the life out of you!"

He leaned forward as he spoke, with his long arms outstretched, and Jerry turned to run.

"Stop, you meddling young fool, or I'll shoot you down like a dog!"

A shrill, frightened cry broke from Ethel's trembling lips, and Jerry glanced swiftly over his shoulder, to gaze straight down the gleaming barrel of a heavy revolver.

"I mean what I say!" thundered the man, still covering Jerry. "This revolver is made to go off, and I'm desperate. Drop that box and clear off, or I shoot!"

For a moment Jerry thought of hurling the box into the man's face and taking a chance of gaining possession of the weapon that menaced him; but the sight of Ethel standing beside him white and trembling made him decide to obey the man's command.

Without a word he placed the box carefully on the ground at his feet, and gripped his chum by the hand.

"Don't worry, Ethel," he whispered reassuringly, although his heart was thumping in his throat with nervous excitement. "I'll see that you come to no harm."

"Now get out!" rasped the man. "And move quickly! If you don't, I'll help you along with a bullet!"

Jerry did not wait to argue in the face of a loaded revolver. He realised that his position was hopeless, and he made up his mind to warn the police as quickly as possible.

Still keeping a firm grip on his chum's hand, he hurried across the garden, and had almost reached the main gate when he suddenly missed his pet.

"I say, Ethel, where's Uncle Bones?" he gasped out. "I haven't seen him since we discovered the box. Do you think he——"

"I saw him hopping around near the box after you had opened it," broke in Ethel. "I wonder if he was inside when the wind shut down the lid?"

"It's quite likely—uncle is such an inquisitive old thing!" The boy glanced back to see the thief just disappearing through a gap in the fence. "Yes, uncle must have got shut up in that box," he went on, "and that scoundrel has got him. Poor uncle, he will——"

He suddenly darted away across the garden towards the gap in the fence through which the thief had disappeared, leaving Ethel staring blankly after him.

"Jerry, where are you going?"

But the boy paid no heed to his chum's question. His mind was too full of his pet.

Ethel watched him until he had almost reached the fence, then she went running madly after him.

As Jerry wormed his way through the fence and glanced swiftly up and down the quiet country lane, he saw the thief sitting under an oak-tree about fifty yards away. He was fumbling at the padlock, apparently trying to find a key to fit it; and with his eyes glued on the man, Jerry crept silently forward under cover of the hedge until he was within twenty yards of the man.

Then he pulled up quickly and shrank back into the hedge as the man suddenly leaped to his feet. The next moment Jerry understood the reason for his sudden action, for he heard a muffled voice come from the black metal box at the man's feet, which he instantly recognised as belonging to his pet.

"Corks! It ain't half dark in here, mate!" came the voice of Uncle Bones from inside the box. "Put a penny in the gas! I can't see meself speak!"

The parrot's voice had a startling effect on the man. He stepped back quickly, as if he had trodden on a snake, and stared at the box with eyes that bulged from his head with astonishment.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "I'm sure I heard a voice come from that box, but that's silly. I must be getting nervy and imagining things."

"No, you ain't mate!" shouted Uncle Bones. "Your old uncle's in here, and I'm nearly choked. Give us a cup of fresh air!"

"Great powers!" spluttered the thief. "The box must be haunted. Bah! If it is a ghost I'll soon settle it!"

As he spoke he whipped out his revolver and levelled it at the box, but before he could pull the trigger Jerry picked up a big stone and hurled it with all his strength at the thief.

Thud!

The stone landed behind the man's ear, and with a groan the ruffian swayed unsteadily on his feet for a moment, then collapsed in a heap over the box.

Like a flash Jerry darted towards him, and wrenching the revolver from the man's nerveless fingers, stood up and covered him with it.

Just at this moment Ethel arrived, white and breathless, and with the aid of the man's keys she soon released Uncle Bones.

By the time the thief recovered his senses the parrot was hopping about as chirpy as ever, and Ethel had hurried away to fetch help.

"It's my turn to do the talking now," said Jerry grimly, as the thief blinked up at him, "and I shall pull the trigger of this gun if you make the slightest movement."

"That's right, Jerry! Hit him on the boko!" shouted Uncle Bones.

The thief stared hard at the bird, then glanced up at Jerry.

"So that was the voice I heard in the box," he said.

Jerry nodded.

"Well, I go to sea!" growled the man. "Fancy being trapped by a bird! Great Scott!"

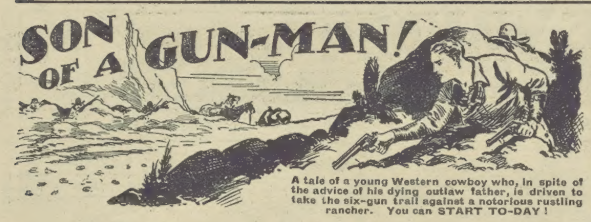
"No; Uncle Bones is me name!" squawked the parrot.

Ten minutes later Ethel arrived with two stalwart policemen, who, after congratulating the chums on their smart capture, hurried the thief along to the station.

The next day the police discovered the owners of the jewellery, and Jerry and Ethel received a handsome reward.

(There will be another complete adventure of Jerry Jones, Uncle Bones, and Ethel Bright in next Saturday's JESTER. Order your copy to-day.)

14-12-29



A tale of a young Western cowboy who, in spite of the advice of his dying outlaw father, is driven to take the six-gun trail against a notorious rustling rancher. You can START TO-DAY!

Moving On.

SONNY HARDING stifled the pangs of his conscience as he gazed at the three dead men as they sprawled on the floor of the little ranch-house to which Slim Hankins and Buck Malloy had brought him.

Both he and his dead father had fought hard that this moment should never arrive. Glyn Harding, son of an outlaw himself, had fought Fate itself that Sonny should never take the gun-trail.

But Fate was the victor. Resolved as he was to wipe out the whole breed of the Hardings, Bullseye Burk, boss of the range, unscrupulous lord of the entire district, had set to work to get the boy into his power.

Already Burk had formulated false charges of murder and theft against Sonny—even now the boy would have been in gaol on these false charges had it not been for the timely arrival of Buck Malloy and Slim Hankins.

Buck had explained something of Burk's infamous history; had told Sonny how with the aid of his band of Masked Raiders the cattle boss forced his will on all those that came within his ken. Buck and Slim were pledged to smash Bullseye Burk; pledged to humble him in the dust; to break his power so that his powerful band of ex-convicts and gunmen would leave him.

Only when that had happened could anyone expect to stand up to Burk with a fair chance of surviving a gun duel.

Sonny had joined them now in this resolve to break Burk. Still vivid in the young man's memory was the cruel death of his outlaw father, shot down by Burk's men, commanded by Burk, all working under cover of the law, and shielded by sheriffs whom Burke himself appointed.

And so Buck and Slim had brought him to this little ranch, owned by a friend of theirs, and they had arrived just in time to save the rancher's life from three of Burk's raiders.

The old rancher quickly forgot the danger he had been in as he hurriedly prepared a meal.

As he poked about over the fire Buck Malloy asked him tersely how the raiders had managed to force their way into the ranch-house and thus get the drop on its owner.

"They've been hanging around for the last two or three days, Buck," the rancher explained. "I was wary, and decided to slip up into the hills and push my little herd into that hidden valley you showed me. Once I got them through the little pass I stretched a rawhide rope across the mouth to keep 'em in, and made camp outside, armed with a rifle and plenty of ammunition. Just about sundown to-day one of those gents rides right up to the little valley and starts to take down my rope. I jumped him, naturally. Stuck him up with my gun, and leads him none too gently back here."

He paused, and poured out three big cups of black coffee, which the boys seized eagerly.

"At the door of the shack here the other two gents were waiting, and I was presented with a free look down their gun-barrels. They tried to make me talk, and I wouldn't. Then they searched me, and found my marshal's badge. That made 'em more curious than ever, and they asked me a whole heap of questions, which I wouldn't answer. Then they stuck me against the wall and tried a little pistol practice, to make me open my mouth. Then you fellows came rushing in, and, thanks to Sonny here, I've still got my good health."

"They might have killed you," said Sonny slowly.

"Not if they knew it," replied the rancher. "Dead men don't answer questions—and they were just itching to know something about that marshal's badge of mine."

That badge worried Sonny for a while, too. He thought it was strange that men like Buck Malloy and Slim Hankins, whom he was sure were outlaws and riders of the gun-trail like himself, should have a law-marshal for a friend. But he was not able to ask questions just then, for Buck suddenly announced that they would shortly be moving on.

Slim Hankins groaned as he heard this news.

"You'll be the death of me, Buck," he said. "Here have I been racing round country all day, and feeling about as tired as——"

"We're moving to-night, Slim," said Buck, a little sharply. "Maybe you didn't see the faces of these men we've got the better of. The big one was Trigger Harris—one of the finest two-gun men that Bullseye Burk ever got hold of. Harris has a brother who also rides for Burk—when he sees brother Trigger brought home he—well, we'd better be moving on, that's all I've got to say."

"Yeah!" said Slim. "You're right, Buck—you usually are. We don't want the whole gang trouncing down on our necks—yet. When we're ready to make our play we'll do it properly. It ain't wise to get caught when only half our plans is made."

An Interruption.

IT was very dark as they left the ranch-house and made for the shed where their horses had been taken while they fed.

Buck entered the shed first, but at the very door he paused and stepped out again quickly.

"The horses are gone!" he snapped.

Slim whipped round quickly, gazing into the gloom as if he expected to find them grazing near at hand.

"Funny!" he said. "I put them in here right after the mess inside was over, Buck. Meant to unsaddle them—but thought it safer not to in case you wanted to get away pronto."

"Someone's been around!" announced Buck. "Like as not, still is around! Tread lightly, fellows!"

Sonny felt himself grow cold again with an ugly sense of impending danger. Had there been others of the Masked Raiders around? Had Burk's men even now tracked them down?

Suddenly Buck gripped him by the shoulder and pointed ahead in the darkness.

"Maybe your eyes are better than mine, son," he whispered. "Look ahead there—on that rise!"

Sonny strained his eyes through the blackness, and then nodded.

"Someone there!" he muttered. "With a pony that doesn't seem to like a strange hand! Looks to me that our horses are there, Buck!"

"Spread out and flank him!" snapped Buck softly. "Go quietly—if he suspects we're near he'll mount and stampede the bunch."

"The senors lift the hands queeck, please!" An unseen form hissed the command behind Sonny and Slim. Both whirled round and found themselves confronted by a tall Mexican who held a grim, menacing revolver.

Buck turned to Sonny, who was silently cleaning and reloading his guns.

"You're in on this game, Sonny," he said. "And to-night's work entitles you to expect to be shot down the moment any one of Burk's men set eyes on you. This range feud's been running a long time. Your grandfather was in the opening act—your father played his part in it, and now Fate has dragged you in. Killing those raiders of Burk's is a deliberate hit at this range-boss. From to-night everyone of us is a marked man. But Burk's way isn't to kill—at first. He'll break you, hound you from pillar to post, make you talk of his power among your fellow-men, and inspire them with fear of him before he kills."

He paused, and for a moment looked sadly and bitterly at his own hands which Sonny had noticed were so painfully slow when they went for a gun.

"We've gone too far to draw back now, Sonny," he went on. "Burk's broken a lot of men, and let them live to talk about it. Most of 'em are coming back to this part of the State to make one last effort against Burk. They're going to strike back in Burk's own fashion; they're going to steal his herds, each man taking back for himself just the number of cattle that Burk destroyed of his."

He paused again, and his jaw jutted forward and that fighting gleam came into his eyes again.

"At dawn we meet those fellows at a certain spot up in the hills back of us here," he went on. "And soon after we make our last play against Bullseye Burk!"

With a challenging look at his pards, Buck turned on his heel and strode out of the door.

Slim and Sonny followed him, the boy's face, very grim, as silently he registered a vow of determination to rid the range of its powerful terror, Bullseye Burk.

He disappeared into the darkness. Sonny slipped away in another direction. Slim Hankins went straight forward.

Sonny took a wide half-circle, and then began to draw in towards the spot where he was certain horses stood.

Twice he paused to listen, and once he heard a horse whinny. On hands and knees he crept closer. A dim shape loomed up at his elbow, and he whipped his gun around. Then he recognised Slim Hankins' low voice:

"Can't see anyone," muttered Slim. "Only horses. Looks like——"

"The senors lift the hands queeck, please!"

An unseen form hissed the command behind them. Both whirled and found themselves confronted by a tall Mexican whose hand held the business end of a grim, menacing revolver.

They could do nothing but obey. The Mexican motioned them to rise, and urging them forward, he made them walk straight ahead.

Five ponies suddenly appeared before them. They almost stumbled across the figure of Buck Malloy, who seemed as if he were just about to mount. Again came that hissing Mexican voice:

"Stick up your hands, senor!"

It seemed for a moment as if Buck Malloy would make a dive for his guns. But he couldn't quite see the lithe Mexican, covered as he was by the bodies of Slim and Sonny.

Buck, too, could only raise his hands.

The Mexican slipped quickly into his saddle and leaned over them.

His big revolver swung under their noses; his eyes glowed with hatred.

"There is trouble, senors, eh?" he snarled. "My friends do not come back to thees camp. I go look and find the senors have shot my friends. 'Tis the war, eh? Caramba! The Senor Burk he will have mooch to say to you about the killing. Yes! I did not think I catch you so easy! Now you get the move on—queeck!"

Buck swung forward obediently. So did Sonny. Then the boy's leg suddenly shot out, and the sharp spur on his heel stung the Mexican's pony sharply on the foreleg.

The horse reared and squealed, pawing the air in fright.

The Mexican was nearly unseated, and he clawed frantically at the saddle, his gun swaying aside.

Then Buck was on him in a flash, dragging him to earth from the saddle. Slim's gun-barrel dropped him to the earth, silenced.

"Very neat work, Sonny!" muttered Buck, as he swung into the saddle.

"Yeah!" echoed Slim. "Hope the rest will come as easy."

They rode fast, not even pausing now to discover if any followed them. Everything depended on joining up with the ranchers up in the hills now.

But though they kept their ponies hard at it for hour after hour, it was nearly dawn before the three pards started to descend the little valley to the meeting-place.

Buck led the way, with Sonny riding knee to knee with him. Slim rode some yards behind them, as they neared a little shack on the valley bottom.

The door was closed, and Sonny saw the steel-rimmed nose of a rifle poking from a crack to the left of the door.

Then a rifle rang out, and a bullet churned up the trail but a few feet from them.

They reined in hastily, and Slim Hankins slipped the rifle from the saddle-boot beside him.

Another bullet sang in the crisp morning air and thudded a few feet to the left of them. Then from the shack came a hoarse cry:

"Who are you? What d'ye want?"

Buck smiled, and, cupping his hands, shouted back:

"Bullseye Burk!"

Then he advanced slowly, with a word to the others to remain where they were for the time being.

"I've given the password," he said. "But I've got to let 'em see who I am before they'll let us join them."

The door of the shack opened at last, and a man came out with a rifle in his hands. Behind him one could see others with guns held ready.

"All right, fellers!" cried the doorkeeper. "It's Buck Malloy and Slim Hankins! Save your lead for fellers who deserve it better than these two guys!"

There followed a period of hand-shaking, and curious eyes were cast in Sonny's direction, until his name was mentioned, and then he, too, was accepted as a friend.

The three newcomers filed into the shack now. Sonny saw ten men there, all hard-bitten and hard-eyed. There were a few white-headed men among them; all were older men than he. As someone boiled coffee the boy knew that they were sizing him up, taking in every inch of him, and no doubt wondering if he was as good a gunman as had been his father.

They jested over the coffee that followed. Laughed lightly as Buck told of the interruption of the night before; of the killing of Trigger Harris and his companions; of the outwitting of the Mexican, who had all but trapped them as they were leaving.

Then one of the men detached himself from the general group, and took Sonny aside.

"You don't know me personally, Harding," he said. "My name's Russell—Ben Russell. Old John Russell was my brother, and—and Myra is my daughter!"

"You—you're Myra's father!" exclaimed Sonny eagerly. "I—I understood you were dead!"

"As good as," said the man bitterly. "Burk broke me, ruined me, and nearly killed me. I heard only the other day of how my brother was killed, and—well, I had to come back with these others. I saw Myra—only last night, and she gave me a message for you!"

"She—she knew that I would be here—with Buck and Slim?" said the boy in some amazement.

Russell nodded.

"She knew you'd be fighting Burk," he said. "She knew that I was going to join Malloy. Myra bid me tell you she—she'd be waiting for you when—this—was all over!"

Sonny thrilled. He could not have received a more heartening message than this from the girl he loved, and, coming as it did, on the very eve of battle, it gave him courage to face the terrors ahead—and certainly did every man need courage to do battle against Bullseye Burk!

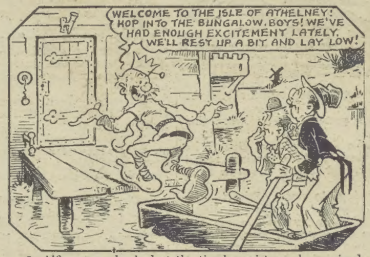
(Another long instalment of this fine Western yarn will appear in next Saturday's JESTER.)

14-12-29

THE WORLD WIDE WANDERINGS OF BASIL & BERT

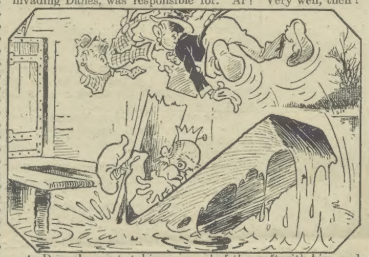
OUR LADS VISIT KING ALFRED'S COUNTRY HOME.

1. You will remember that the famous time-machine which Basil and Bert now owned had taken those wanderers right back to the days of King Alfred—he of the famous cakes. You will also recollect that Basil and Bert were able to help the king through an odd spot of bother that Guthrum, King of the invading Danes, was responsible for. Ar! Very well, then!

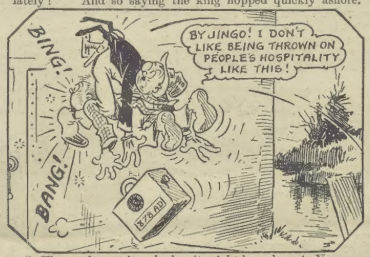

WELCOME TO THE ISLE OF ATHELNEY! HOP INTO THE BUNGALOW, BOYS! WE'VE HAD ENOUGH EXCITEMENT LATELY. WE'LL REST UP A BIT AND LAY LOW!

2. Alfie was so bucked at the timely assistance he received that he invited the lads to come with him and visit his country home on the banks of the river. "I've got a nice little place here on the Isle of Athelney," he said. "Let's trickle into my bungalow and have a rest! We've had too much excitement lately!" And so saying the king hopped quickly ashore.

3. At least, he started to hop ashore but the movement seemed to have bored him! Yes, he trod on a loose board and the next moment received a faceful of wood that didn't at all improve his appearance or his temper. "Corks!" gasped Bert. "If he'd only stopped aboard he wouldn't have stopped a board like that!" Then Alfie crashed on to the little boat!

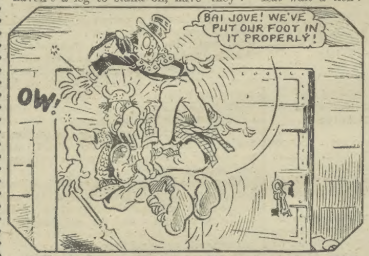


4. Down he went, taking one end of the craft with him, and naturally t'other end shot into the air, and Basil and Bert with it! "Seems to me we're going ashore whether we want to or not, sir!" gasped Bert. "Look out for the big crash!" When it comes to dodging trouble those world-wanderers haven't a leg to stand on, have they? But wait a tick!

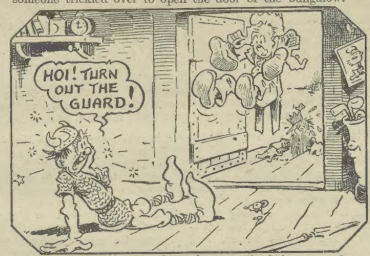


5. The crash wasn't so bad as it might have been! You see, over the door of the king's home there was fixed a big lantern-hook, and upon this hook Basil and Bert were caught! True, they crashed a loud tattoo with their boots on the door, but that didn't hurt them. Then there was a stir within and someone trickled over to open the door of the bungalow.

6. That someone was Seedcake, the Saxon guard, and as Alfie was a bit late for dinner said guard rushed to the door willing to bet a pound his sovereign had arrived. Open went the door with a slam—and back swung Basil and Bert out of view! But believe us they weren't out of view for long! Seedcake very soon had them in his eye—properly! Ha, ha!



7. Yes, back swung the lads, and Seedcake got his features in the way. With a couple of thuds the lads landed on the Saxon's upper teeth and severely pushed him over. "By Jove!" muttered Basil. "We seem to have put our foot in it, Bert! Wonder what sort of trouble we'll have to face now!" "He'll have trouble with his face, anyway!" said Bert.



8. For some moments things hung in the balance—and so did our world-wanderers. Then Seedcake took a deep breath and bawled with all his might for the guard to turn out. "What a turn-out!" gasped Bert. "Why isn't the king here to lend us a hand?" "We need a hand to get out of this!" moaned Basil. "A nap-hand, king, queen, ace, jack, ten!"

9. It was at this moment that Alfie managed to get himself out of deep water and scramble ashore like a half-drowned winkle. With a couple of eyes full of mud he rushed towards his residence groping for a towel. "It's a black outlook!" he yelled. "A towel, a towel! My kingdom for a towel!" Then the old lad grabbed a piece of cloth as he thought!

10. As a matter of fact it was Bert's coat that he grabbed, and there and then he started to wipe his features somewhat heartily. The old lad was in a better temper the moment he got the mud out of his eyes and promised not to come down so heavily on the folks that had caused him all this trouble! But Basil's poor old coat couldn't stand the terrible strain!

11. What with Bert's weight and then the added strain of Alfie wiping out his ears, Basil's coat gave a despairing rip on the nail above and then gave way! With a thud and a wallop our lads came down on the king and once more poor old Alfie was knocked for ninety! Basil didn't appreciate the fact that he had fallen upon the king's solid gold crown either!

12. Then things began to look blacker and blacker! By this time the guard had turned out, and when they saw the lads sitting on their king they got quite nasty about it. "Crumbs!" gasped Bert. "We're for it now, sir! They'll make mince-meat of us for this!" "Maybe!" said Basil. "But the war won't start until next Saturday! That's one consolation!"

BASIL AND BERT WHIZ ALONG TO THE COURT OF KING ARTHUR NEXT SATURDAY! DON'T MISS THIS!

Printed and published every Saturday by the Proprietor: The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Sole agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd. Sole agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.—Saturday, December 14th, 1929. LL